

THE FIRST ELEPHANTS

A Little Tale for Big Folks
or
a Big Tale for Little Folks

by
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CHAPTER I In The Beginning

Long before elephants roamed the earth, swaying away their days, eating this and that and most anything in between, swimming when they weren't eating, leaving large, rich deposits of partially digested bamboo, sugar cane, bananas, tree limbs, grasses and other delightful foods, and, when they weren't nudging each other about the sky, singing away to their heart's content— before all of this—well, there were no elephants. There was, of course, Creator, who, in order for this story to make any sense whatsoever, had already created rivers and oceans, vast fields of grasses, flowers of all colors and trees of every kind.

Mountains and valleys Creator made with great relish. He liked the big stuff. One of the first things Creator made was Sun, which allowed

Day. And that meant there should be Night when Sun left for a while. Creator gave us Moon so some creatures could see what they were eating. Creator had to think about everything. Small Fish only swam upstream while Big Fish swam downstream. Creator gave Small Fish a good nose and Big Fish bad eyes. Balance, thought Creator, was the way to go.

I don't know why Creator made Human before Elephant, but He did. There are some who think otherwise and they're entitled to their own story. But we're here, in this story.

Creator made all sort of Human folk: big ones, small ones, skinny and fat folk, some with black hair, red hair, yellow hair, curly or straight, and even no hair. He made them with bodies of many, strange shapes, colors and smells. Creator made them smart or stupid, happy or sad, some forgetful, some diligent and some mean. Some very mean. And some folk He made quite nice. He made them any way he wanted to. He could do that.

But he hadn't made Elephant. Not yet. The idea came to Him at the precise moment He was having a large bowl of muesli. He'd thought about all the marvelous things He'd created. And the more he thought, the more He chewed. Everything seemed a bit... well, 'ho-hum' and the doldrums settled in the back of His mind. Then His entire Magnificence filled with immense ennui. This altogether left a bad taste in His mouth and, with His infinite tongue, He began to probe for stray bits of cereal and dried fruit caught between His perfect teeth.

"Of course!" He exploded with a God-awful bellow.

And, of course, He realized His mistake. Creator had thought Human to be His penultimate Creation, that His sole purpose was to make Human 'human'. But, really, He wondered, are all these boring, two-legged creatures with flat faces truly meant to be the climax of my BIG BANG? What could this mean?

What it meant was He wasn't finished. The big 'It' wasn't com-

plete. Now life had new meaning, much more than just a bowl of muesli. Creator danced out of His big kitchen and dashed down the long hall to His cavernous studio where He spent a fair bit of time. It's impossible to say just how big Creator's studio was, or is, since the more He makes, the bigger it gets, but it was big and big things happened there.

In the beginning there was so much to get done, many things to think about and worry over, what to make and how to make it. But then to actually see all these things work. Well, that was the BIG payday for Creator. All those huge, fiery balls spinning out of His closet, across the room and out past the veranda; nebulae upon nebulae. Such a riveting good time He had in the beginning.

By the time He got to Human, however, He was a bit exhausted and had grown rather weary with all the details constantly sprouting from all those little Human needs.

Now a new idea had formed in Creator's boundless mind. Something exciting was about to happen. So exciting, in fact, Creator had to take a break and retire for lunch. And after lunch, He drifted out to His galactic hammock where He often drifted in and out of sleep. This is where He did His best work. For Creator, it was only a matter of imagining something, whether asleep or awake, for it to really happen. Creator was quite proud of this ability and, quite wisely, decided not to pass it on to Human. By this time, Creator was rather put out with Human's proclivity for dumbness.

When He had made Human, He made them look a lot like Himself. Unfortunately Human somehow found out.

"This just won't do", said Creator. "No, not at All."

Creator thus gave Human the gift of sleep and while he slept and fell into blissful dreams, Creator stepped on him. Yes, indeed. Stepped right on his face. This explains why Human is rather flat-faced and this delighted Creator to no end. He loved a good joke and of course this was

Creator's best joke because Human had no idea he'd been stepped on, and, to this day, still believes he looks an awful lot like Creator.

Creator realized He had made only one Human.

"This isn't good either," mumbled Creator, "because without someone else to speak to, or for, or with, or about, he'll pester me from dawn to dark!"

Creator decided to tinker a bit with His design. He wasn't tightfisted. No, not at all... just, shall we say, infinitely frugal. Thus He stretched His material a bit and created a She-Human from Human's better half. Now Human had someone to talk to, for, with and about. Human has been rather upset with this little trick ever since.

As He gently rolled about in His heavens, Creator began to hum a great cosmic OM. Gently so, back and forth. Soft and pure, Spirit sang and thunder rumbled and tumbled forth from Creator's Godly nose. Far below, the earth and all it's inhabitants, Bird to Bug to Human, trembled beneath Creator's snoring.

CHAPTER II New One

In His Universal sleep, Creator imagines a vast celestial egg shimmering in the emptiness of Nothing. He soon begins to feel, to see, even to smell, a new creation. He calls upon His Divine Selfness to name it

NEW ONE, to give it shape, then breath and voice.

He decides NEW ONE will have a nose as long and glorious as his; a nose so versatile it can tear up trees and thread a needle or blow wind and rain throughout the Kingdom. NEW ONE shall have the shape and color of clouds from which it is born and shall have large ears to hear the truth and steady itself in the currents of the air. Creator gave NEW ONE a healthy appetite, legs like trees and large, flat feet to cushion its landing, should it ever need or want to land. Oh yes, Creator also gave NEW ONE the ability to fly. He gave it supple skin with only a little hair and a curiously gentle eye. Creator bestowed adaptability and patience, courage and love. He was obviously fond of NEW ONE.

Creator also wanted NEW ONE to be smart. But how smart?

“There’s danger there”, He said guardedly. “Look what happened to Human. He’s tried his best to take advantage of my little gift of intelligence, even though he just won’t stay smart.”

So He made NEW ONE very smart indeed and He gave him a mammoth memory. Everything seemed in place. Everything looked smashingly good, everything, except the voice. Creator had to think about this for a long spell. He Himself had a flawless voice. He could say, “Please pass the peas,” or “Do you think It will rain this afternoon?” with incredible eloquence. He had given this complicated gift to Human but soon realized Human was always forgetting how to talk, when to talk and where to talk. With NEW ONE’s gift of memory, this wouldn’t be a problem at all, so Creator gave NEW ONE the same voice He had given Human and that was that. Well, almost.

CHAPTER III Tickled Pink

The great cosmic egg that held NEW ONE was about to break. Creator still had a few options left and he decided to Give NEW ONE an advantage over Human, so rather than one or two, or three, or four, NEW ONE became eight large creatures that burst forth fully formed, round like the clouds, chatting away. When they beheld their Creator, you can imagine the first words they spoke.

“Please pass the peas.” And “Do you think it will rain this afternoon?” came tumbling forth along with squeaks, and pips, snorts, rumbles and roars. They could purr like a cat or make sounds only Creator could hear. They preferred to speak like Creator, which was like Human and so they did. But unlike Human, they could fly and Creator was tickled pink.

When Creator finished a creation, He named it. And once He named it, He was pretty much finished with it. This is not to say He was no longer interested, but Creator had a good deal left to do and was anxious to get back to His hammock. Because there were eight new creatures and not just one, Creator thought He might give NEW ONE a new name.

He thought of such things as 'Fatties', 'Skypigs', 'Domeheads', even 'Flatfeet', but none of those seemed noble enough. Creator finally decided to call them Elephant, which originally meant Face of God. But of course Human changed all that after a time. Human was good at that.

Thus Elephant came into the world, lumbering about in the clouds, chatting away with each other and often to Creator, who never let on He heard them. Sometimes Elephant would try and speak to Human, since they shared the same voice, but Human wasn't very interested in anything they had to say.

"Never mind", Elephant said, "We have places to go and plenty to do."

CHAPTER IV Into Everything

Now it just so happened, by this time, Humans had become many. Too many in fact and Creator decided to take away the big H, so ever after, Human became simply humans and Day; little d days, Sun; sun, Bug; bugs and so forth. Humans got to be everywhere, got into everything.

They kept moving around and, sure enough, humans began forgetting their first voice. So they made up new voices. They made a lot of things. They made villages, towns and cities. They made clothes and money and profit. They made trouble, then arrangements of all kind. They made contracts and tried to make sure none were broken. Humans made beds and babies, music and art and religions, delicious jams from every fruit. They made coffee and chairs to sit in while they made up stories. They made investments and zoos. They made taverns and churches, the clergy and the lay. They made hammocks, hobbies and hermits.

Meanwhile, the elephants were still occupying a good part of the sky, dropping down to eat whenever they felt hungry. The only things elephants made were big shadows on the ground, deep, melodious farts and significant deposits of partially digested grasses, leaves and fruit. And how they loved to sing all the while. It was a happy time in the clouds.

CHAPTER V Ripe Bananas

One day, rather late in the afternoon, the elephants began a slow descent to earth. They had been cavorting all over the heavens, working on a choral piece with eight-part harmony. This is hard work and whenever they worked hard, they always liked to treat themselves to something

delicious. And to them, nothing is more delicious than ripe bananas. They spied a magnificent banana tree that nearly sank to the ground with bananas, each banana as ripe as it can get before it isn't ripe anymore. This was exactly what they had in mind. All at once and all together they clapped their ears against the clouds and began a fast downward spiral for supper.

When Creator made elephants, He was so excited about giving them long noses, He failed to give them good eyes; what the elephants couldn't see beneath the banana tree was an old hermit fast asleep in his hammock. Though Creator never once mentioned hammocks to humans, they got the idea anyway and, like Him, spent a lot of time there, thinking about any number of things. Usually they thought about what they would do the next day or should have done the day before.

This particular banana tree happened to be surrounded by a ring of coconut trees; here was a splendid landing spot on which to better get at the bananas.

Though elephants could fly, they were, nonetheless, heavy. An elephant standing in the top of a coconut tree is a thing to behold. The trees began to quiver and shake under such weight. And soon enough all the shaking and all the quivering caused the coconuts to come tumbling down. First one, then two, then a whole crew of coconuts began to drop and rocket through the fronds of the banana tree to the ground below. By elephant standards, a coconut is hardly anything at all, but to a human head some forty feet below, it's altogether a different matter, as you might imagine. Regretfully for the elephants, this particular human had one of the hardest heads humans can have.

CHAPTER VI The Hermit

The hermit in our story was not your run-of-the-mill hermit. He was also a holy man. It is a known fact that there are two kinds of holy men. The first kind of holy man is hard to find because he doesn't usually call himself holy; he doesn't usually say much about anything. He sits a lot. He doesn't necessarily think a lot but a lot of humans think they know what this kind of holy man is thinking.

The other kind of holy man also sits a lot and spends a good bit of time thinking about what other people are doing and what they have and how he can get it. Our hermit was this kind of holy man and not a very pleasant one. And he had some rather interesting powers he invoked when he got the slightest bit upset.

In fact, he was serenely dreaming about this fine ability when the first coconut struck and flattened even flatter his flat face. Then another

one fell, and another, until he was nearly buried in coconuts. The only things not buried were his two large, dirty feet.

At first, he thought he might still be dreaming because he heard strange yet pleasant sounds coming from the heavens above. But soon enough, his body caught up with his mind. He screamed and, painfully twisting, shook off the load of coconuts from his body. First one eye opened, then the other. He saw a small herd of elephants sitting in the tops of 'his' coconut trees, eating 'his' bananas from 'his' favorite banana tree.

"Outrageous!" He fumed.

Quite happily, the elephants were discussing whether or not it should have been a diminished third or an augmented seventh at the beginning of the first measure of the last stanza of the choral piece they had worked on all day; at the same time they were wrenching loose golden hands of bananas and swooshing them toward their endless appetites with powerful yet delicate trunks.

The holy man was not unaware of these strange looking creatures from the sky, so ridiculously happy and always hungry! He knew very well they were Creator's tubby little pets.

Though they would occasionally try and speak with him, he refused to have anything to do with them. Holy man didn't think it fair these ungainly and flat-footed beasts could not only speak 'his' language but they could fly. And he couldn't.

"An immeasurable injury, to be sure", he mumbled into his crusty beard. "and now this new and painful insult. Surely I ought to be able to come up with some clever curse to put things right in this world." He noisily considered his options, while savagely rubbing the knots growing on his head.

Now the elephants had no idea they had caused such a ruckus below. With such big ears it should be obvious they have terrific hearing.

And they do. But they were having such a grand time discussing this and that and munching on bananas, they didn't hear much of anything except themselves.

Holy man was quite naturally excited with an irresistible urge to get even with, if not rid of, these chattering chubs. In tight circles his scrawny legs spun in anticipation. He had to move fast. He was aware his powers had certain limitations and one of those was what he liked to call 'distance of durability'. In other words, his curses worked wonders up close but not at all from some distance.

And he had no idea how long the elephants would be perched up in 'his' coconut trees, pilfering 'his' fruit. Besides, he had never once put a curse on an elephant, let alone eight, so he was pretty sure he'd have to work fast and hard to get any real enjoyment out of the rest of his day.

Once Holy man had gathered up all the curse paraphernalia holy men need, he gathered that much eight times again and doubled all for good measure. Such strenuous running around began to work out a few kinks; holy man was beginning to really enjoy himself. When he thought he had collected enough, he put everything in a big pile and, with a flat, gray rock and a few dry sticks, he struck a spark and set the pile ablaze. As the red fire grew and black smoke coiled upward, Holy Hermit stood on one leg, waving both arms like a bird struggling to take flight. With a thin, reedy voice, he spat forth a hullabaloo of noise that rose up into the trees. Higher and higher it went, up with the smoke of his jealous heart.

Of course, higher still, Creator heard all this commotion below, but didn't pay too much attention at the time as he was stretched out in the luxury of an afternoon nap.

First one elephant, then two, then all eight, began to smell something most unpleasant. In unison, they dropped what few bananas were left, curled, then uncurled, their trunks, stretching them back and forth

in the air then back into their mouths, then out again. Their chattering ceased. They heard a most unpleasant noise and they smelled a most unpleasant smell. Each elephant crouched, as best an elephant can, and peered over the tops of the coconut trees, down through the banana trees and what they saw was most unpleasant. They had never seen, nor heard nor smelled anything like this before. This was not good, they all thought at once. What was causing all the smoke and why was this strange human standing on one scrawny leg screaming toward the heavens? It was time to leave.

CHAPTER VII Into The Jungle

Each and every one of them clapped their ears and nothing happened. They didn't go up. They didn't go sideways. Nor did they stay where they were. They went down. They plummeted straight down to the ground, right through the coconut trees, smashing through the banana trees, landing with a big thud.

Fortunately Creator had given them legs like trees and great flat feet in case they ever wanted or needed to land. They were grateful Creator had this foresight and, in chorus, they began to thank Him, but they no longer could speak the language of Creator and flat-faced humans. As hard as they tried, not one decent word could they bring forth. Not 'Please pass

the peas', nor "Do you think it'll rain this afternoon?" Not even "Let's all go eat." Nothing.

Never mind, they thought in unison, never mind. In no time at all they were chatting away, singing with pips and squeaks, snorts and rumbles and occasional trumpeting.

And this was what the holy man was determined to do. It wasn't so much that the elephants had landed in 'his' trees and eaten 'his' bananas. And it wasn't because the elephants nearly buried him alive in coconuts.

The holy man was just plain jealous.

It's hard to believe that elephants once flew in the skies, or could sing and speak the same as you and I, but they did.

It's also hard to believe we once looked a lot like elephants, but we did.

The elephants never said much about the holy man's curse. And Creator has never, not once, mentioned it. But, from the beginning, elephants had been given adaptability and patience and they accepted their fate. And why not? They have their very own special voice and, after all, they know very well everything they eat grows down on the ground.

"Never mind", rumbled the elephants, as they plodded into the jungle. "Never mind, we have plenty to do looking for food. That is what we love and what we plan to do."

The End

